



## **What Every Long Islander Should Know About “Open Spaces”**

By: Nancy Rauch Douzinas

Long Island’s last remaining open space is vanishing almost daily. Meanwhile, tens of millions of dollars, set aside for reservation, are sitting in Town and County bank accounts.

The need for preservation is clear. Public support for it is overwhelming. Yet whether it actually happens is an open question.

At the Long Island Index, we focus on Long Island’s need to think and plan as one region and then take action. Open space could be the “poster child” for regionalism, for two main reasons.

First, it perfectly illustrates how the issues we face are all interrelated. Open space - protects our drinking water, reduces energy use and pollution, and plays an important role in recreation and our basic quality of life. Open space also underpins tourism, Long Island’s second largest industry.

Conversely unplanned development brings a web of drawbacks. And expansion into more and more remote areas raises taxes, increases traffic and makes housing even more unaffordable for seniors and workers with limited incomes.

Secondly, the effort to preserve open space shows how difficult it can be for our region to get things done—even when we agree on the goals. Consider:

- Starting in 2001 each of the five East End Towns voted overwhelmingly in public referendums to set up Community Preservation Funds.
- By 2004 Nassau and Suffolk Counties and Brookhaven Town had each passed an Environmental Bond Act, raising \$50 million, \$75 million and \$100 million, respectively.
- Then, independent organizations studied and reported on which pieces of land were most important to preserve. In Nassau, a panel was appointed for the purpose. In Suffolk, a coalition of over 100 businesses, civic and environmental groups united behind a master plan developed by the Nature Conservancy to save 25,000 acres of open space and 10,000 acres of farmland.
- Next, the County Legislatures were to approve the master plans. But legislators in western Suffolk complained that too much land was being acquired in eastern Suffolk. Nassau legislators now are balking at approving the overall master plan. They insist on reviewing purchases one by one (read: district by district).
- Today two-thirds of the money remains unspent.



## A *Long Island Index* Briefing

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It is common, of course, for governments to move slowly. In this matter, however, time is not on our side. Although actual build out may be some years away, experts say that the future of the lands in question will be settled, one way or the other, within the next two or three years.

Land that is not preserved by then will be lost. And we will have an even more paved and built-out environment --- the kind of unnatural surrounding, we all voted to avoid.

What our governments do in the next days, weeks and months is critical. Their action, or inaction, will shape the landscape, and the very character of Long Island, for decades to come.

The matter may also determine our future and whether we remain an attractive, livable community for our children and their children. Can we rise to the challenge?

*This is one in a series of articles examining aspects of life on Long Island, presented by the Long Island Index. The Index provides data about the Long Island region, in order to promote informed public debate and sound policymaking. For more information visit [www.longislandindex.org](http://www.longislandindex.org).*

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